

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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INRE-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 EB-07 FEAE-00 SCS-03 SCA-01

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8217

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USCINCEUR LONDON UK

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 0606

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, LE

SUBJECT: KARAME RESIGNATION DOMINATES SCENE; RESHUFFLING A TIRED DECK

REF: BEIRUT 0553 (1258Z)

1. SUMMARY: PRIMIN KARAME, FOLLOWING FRANTIC AND FRUITLESS WEEKEND EFFORTS TO ARRANGE BEIRUT'S 21ST AND 22ND CEASEFIRES IN THE LAST FOUR MONTHS, DROPPED THE SHOE WITH SURPRISE ANNOUNCEMENT LATE EVENING JAN 18 OF HIS INTENTION TO RESIGN (FBIS NC182045Y). IRONICALLY, BY RESIGNING KARAME APPEARS TO HAVE SUCCEEDED IN ACCOMPLISHING--TEMPORARILY AT LEAST--WHAT HE HAD BEEN UNABLE TO DO OTHERWISE--SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE INTENSITY OF ARMED CLASHES IN AND AROUND BEIRUT. KARAME STILL HAS TO REDUCE HIS RESIGNATION TO PAPER, HOWEVER, AND THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT HIS SURPRISE DECISION IS NOT RPT NOT IRREVOCABLE. WE UNDERSTAND BEHIND-THE-SCENES CONTACTS ARE IN PROGRESS TO DETERMINE (A) IF KARAME CAN BE PERSUADED TO REMAIN IN HARNESS AND (B) WHETHER PRES FRANGIE WILL BE INCLINED TO REFUSE HIS RESIGNATION OR EXERCISE OPTION OF APPOINTING REPLACEMENT. MEANWHILE, WITH REMAINDER OF COUNTRY, WE CONTINUE TO WAIT TO SEE WHETHER OTHER SHOE WILL FALL. END SUMMARY.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF JAN 18 CEASEFIRE AGREEMENT. BOTH LEFTISTS/ PALESTINIANS WHO HELD QUARANTINA AND ATTACKING FORCES CLAIM SUCCESSES IN THE VIOLENT, SOMETIMES HAND-TO-HAND BATTLE, BUT IT IS EVIDENT THAT CHRISTIANS DESTROYED ALL OR MOST OF SHANTIES AND DWELLING THERE AS NIGHT SKYLINE WAS LIT BY MASSIVE FIRES. AS NEARLY AS WE CAN DETERMINE AT THIS TIME, CHRISTIANS WERE SUCCESSFUL IN TAKING MOST OF DISTRICT AND ONLY SMALL POCKET OF DEFENDERS, REPORTEDLY NUMBERING ABOUT 50 PERSONS, IS CURRENTLY HOLDING OUT IN VICINITY OF SLEEP COMFORT FURNITURE PLANT. IN THE SOUTH, AT LEAST PART OF DAMOUR CONTINUES TO HOLD AGAINST PALESTINIAN/LEFTISTS AND FATE OF NEARBY JIYE ONCE AGAIN UNCLEAR. ZAHLE WAS AGAIN SCENE JAN 18 OF FIGHTING BUT WE CONFIDENTIAL

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HAVE NO REPORT TODAY. ALSO, YESTERDAY ARMED ELEMENTS, PROBABLY INCLUDING PALESTINIANS, STORMED AND BURNED SERAIL IN TRIPOLI AND TOOK OTHER GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS THERE. IN AKKAR IN FAR NORTH, PALESTINIAN ELEMENTS ALLEGEDLY HAVE ASSUMED CONTROL OF POLICE STATIONS AND BORDER POSTS. IN BAALBEK, MOBILIZATION OF SHIITE TRIBESMEN IS UNDERWAY AND CHRISTIAN VILLAGES, SUCH AS DEIR AL AHMAR, APPARENTLY CONTINUE TO BE INVESTED BY MUSLIM ATTACKERS.

3. LEADING FRENCH-LANGUAGE DAILY JAN 18 REPORTS ENTRY OF 8,000 TROOPS FROM SYRIA, WHICH REPORTEDLY MADE UP OF UNITS OF PALESTINE LIBERATION ARMY, YARMUK BRIGADE (FATAH) AND "AMAL" MILITIA OF IMAM MUSA AS SADR. ACCORDING TO

LEBANESE ARMY SOURCES, THE NUMBER IS CLOSER TO A THOUS-
AND AND THEY ARE MEMBERS OF SA'IQA AND THE YARMUK BRIGADE.
THEY ENTERED COUNTRY AT AL MASNA' AND ARE STRUNG OUT IN
JEEPS AND TRUCKS BETWEEN POINT OF ENTRY AND CHATAURA. WHILE
SOME SOURCES OPINE THAT THESE REINFORCEMENT INTEND TO FORCE
THEIR WAY OVER MOUNTAIN TO BEIRUT TO RELIEVE STILL-BESIEGED
TEL ZAATAR, WE HAVE NO RPT NO CLEAR INDICATION OF THEIR
INTENTIONS AT THIS TIME.

4. PRIMIN KARAME'S LATE-NIGHT RESIGNATION ANNOUNCEMENT
APPARENTLY WAS SURPRISE ALL AROUND. FIRST STEP IN
RESIGNATION PROCEDURE, HOWEVER, REQUIRES THAT KARAME SUB-
MIT RESIGNATION TO PRES IN WRITING, WHICH HE HAS NOT RPT
NOT DONE AS OF 1300 HOURS JAN 19. PROMINENT SHIITE LAWYER,
MOHSEN SLIM, WHO SPOKE WITH KARAME THIS MORNING BY
PHONE, TOLD ACTING DCM THAT KARAME INDICATED HIS DECISION
WAS NOT RPT NOT IRREVOCABLE. SLIM SAID KARAME HAD STATED
THAT HE MAKING PHONE CONTACTS RE FUTURE AND WOULD BE IN
BETTER POSITION AFTERNOON JAN 19 TO SAY WHAT HE WILL DO.
MEANWHILE, FRENCH AMBASSADOR CALLED MORNING JAN 19 ON
BOTH KARAME AND FRANGIE, ACCORDING TO LEBANESE MILITARY
SOURCE WHO WAS INVOLVED IN ARRANGING ESCORT FOR AMB AMYOT.
LOGICAL INFERENCE IS THAT FRENCH AMB SEEKING TO PLAY PEACE-
MAKER ROLE BETWEEN TWO LEADERS IN EFFORT TO HEAD OFF GOVT
CRISIS.

5. KARAME SPENT VERY FRUSTRATING WEEKEND IN EFFORT TO STEM
UPWARD SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE THROUGHOUT COUNTRY. WITH ASSIS-
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TANCE OF ARAB CHIEFS OF MISSION IN BEIRUT, HE ARRANGED--OR
THOUGHT HE HAD--TWO FURTHER CEASEFIRES. PROXIMATE
CAUSE OF HIS DECISION TO THROW IN THE TOWEL WAS REPORTEDLY
ATTACK ON QUARANTINA, APPARENTLY TIMED ALMOST EXACTLY TO
COINCIDE WITH EFFECTIVE HOUR OF LAST CEASEFIRE, BUT KARAME'S
FRUSTRATION HAD BEEN BUILDING BEFORE THAT TIME. UNDER ATTACK
ACROSS THE BOARD--FROM CHAMOUN ON THE RIGHT TO JUMBLATT ON
THE LEFT--FOR HIS INABILITY TO ACHIEVE MILITARY STANDDOWN,
KARAME PROBABLY DETERMINED TO MAKE GOOD THE THREAT OF
RESIGNATION WHICH HE HAS MADE SEVERAL TIMES IN THE SIX AND
ONE-HALF MONTHS OF HIS TENURE. WE ARE TOLD BY A DISTANT
RELATIVE OF KARAME'S THAT HE WAS KNOWN TO BELIEVE THAT
EVERYONE ASSUMED THAT THEY COULD PLAY THEIR POLITICAL GAMES
AND COUNT ON HIM TO REMAIN IN PLACE. TO EXTENT THAT THIS IS
TRUE, KARAME PROBABLY COUNTED UPON HIS MOVE TO EXERT STRONG
SHOCK EFFECT UPON LEBANESE FACTIONS.

6. THERE HAS BEEN SOME SUGGESTION THAT KARAME HAS
ALSO BEEN MIFFED BY FACT THAT SYRIAN GOVT, LONG A STRONG
SUPPORTER OF KARAME, HAS BEEN DEALING DIRECTLY WITH FRANGIE
(SEE BELOW). WE CANNOT DETERMINE AT THIS TIME WHETHER
DAMASCUS HAS WITHDRAWN ANY OF ITS SUPPORT FROM KARAME AT

THIS JUNCTURE, ALTHOUGH HE REPORTEDLY TALKED JAN 18 WITH FONMIN KHADDAM BEFORE GOING PUBLIC WITH ANNOUNCEMENT. AS WE HAVE REPORTED PREVIOUSLY, HOWEVER, KARAME HAD BEEN CHARGED BY SYRIANS AND OTHERS WITH TASK OF DEVELOPING UNIFIED MUSLIM/PROGRESSIVE POSITION WITH WHICH SYRIANS COULD DEAL IN EFFORTS TO PROMOTE COMPROMISE SOLUTION TO LEBANESE CRISIS. IN THIS EFFORT TO GATHER THE VARIOUS STRANDS OF MUSLIM/PROGRESSIVE POLICY INTO HIS HANDS, KARAME HAD BEEN PATENTLY UNSUCCESSFUL. IT MAY THEREFORE BE THAT KARAME HOPED (WITH SYRIAN APPROVAL) TO SHOCK THESE ELEMENTS INTO GREATER COHESION BY THE SPECTER OF OPEN-ENDED CIVIL WAR FOLLOWING HIS RESIGNATION

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8218

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

USINT BAGHDAD

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

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7. CURIOUSLY ENOUGH, AS OF THIS WRITING THE PROJECTED FRANGIE VISIT TO DAMASCUS IS STILL ON, ALTHOUGH NO FIRM DATE HAS BEEN SET. BOTH SELIM AL KHOURY AND FRANGIE EMISSARY LUCIEN DAHDAH HAVE RECENTLY BEEN IN SYRIA, AND FRANGIE HAS REPORTEDLY REMAINED IN PHONE CONTACT WITH SYRIAN LEADERS. JOURNALIST FROM EGYPTIAN PUBLICATION ROSE AL YUSSUF, WHO SPENT LAST WEEK IN SYRIA, TOLD EMBASSY CONTACT ON HIS RETURN TO BEIRUT THAT PRES ASAD AND KHADDAM BOTH HAD STRESSED THAT SYRIA WILL DEAL WITH FRANGIE NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE IS PRES BUT ALSO BECAUSE DAMASCUS BELIEVES HE CAN SPEAK ON BEHALF OF LEBANESE CHRISTIANS. THIS REPORT IS FURTHER CONFIRMATION OF OUR IMPRESSION THAT SYRIANS GREATLY FRUSTRATED BY FRAGMENTATION AND UNDISCIPLINE OF FORCES CONFRONTING CHRISTIAN RIGHT.

8. IT IS PROBLEMATIC WHETHER FRANGIE WILL ACCEPT KARAME'S RESIGNATION WHEN, AND IF, IT IS FORMALLY TENDERED. FRANGIE CLEARLY HAS NO LOVE FOR HIS LONG-TIME RIVAL KARAME WHO WAS FORCED UPON HIM LAST JULY. ON THE OTHER HAND, HE MAY NOW BE CONVINCED BY EXPERIENCE AS WELL AS THE INTERVENTION OF OTHERS SUCH AS THE FRENCH AMB AND POSSIBLY THE SYRIANS, THAT KARAME SHOULD STAY ON, PARTICULARLY IF THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS DEPARTURE HAS THE EFFECT OF STRENGTHENING KARAME AS BARGAINER FOR THE MUSLIM/ PROGRESSIVE GAGGLE.

9. MOST COMPETENT OBSERVERS AGREE THAT FRANGIE HAS THREE REAL OPTIONS IN DEALING WITH THE KARAME RESIGNATION: A) REFUSE TO ACCEPT IT; B) ACCEPT IT AND REAPPOINT KARAME TO FORM A NEW CABINET; OR C) APPOINT A MILITARY CABINET. THERE IS SOME TALK THAT FRANGIE COULD APPOINT ANOTHER MUSLIM CIVILIAN, SUCH AS SLEIMAN AL'ALI, TO REPLACE KARAME, BUT EVEN FRANGIE (HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL) MUST REALIZE BY THIS TIME THAT SUCH AN APPOINTMENT WOULD EXACERBATE POLITICAL SITUATION AND THAT SUCH A TAME SUNNI COULD NOT HOPE TO ACHIEVE WHAT KARAME HAS BEEN UNABLE TO ACCOMPLISH. ALTHOUGH KARAME'S ALLY, SAEB SALAM, HAS BEEN LUKEWARM IN HIS PUBLIC SUPPORT OF KARAME LATELY AND MAY BE JOCKEYING TO ENTER THE LISTS AT A MORE PROPITIOUS MOMENT, WE DO NOT RPT NOT
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BELIEVE THAT ANY STRONG MUSLIM LEADER WOULD BE PREPARED TO SUCCEED KARAME AT THE MOMENT. KARAME IS SLATED TO MEET WITH SALAM, ABDULLAH YAFI AND POSSIBLY OTHER SUNNI LEADERS, PROBABLY INCLUDING THE GRAND MUFTI, TODAY AND WE WOULD EXPECT PLEDGES ALONG THESE LINES TO BE MADE.

10. THERE ARE SOME INDICATIONS THAT FRANGIE MAY BE TOYING WITH IDEA OF MILITARY CABINET, ALTHOUGH HIS EXPERIENCE WITH DEVICE LAST MAY WAS NOT ENCOURAGING. FRANGIE RECEIVED SEVERAL LEBANESE ARMY OFFICERS JAN 18, ACCORDING TO MUKHLES TANNOUS OF PRE'S OFFICE. PROMINENT AMONG THESE WAS BRIG AZIZ AHDAB, SUNNI MUSLIM COMMANDER OF BEIRUT MILITARY DISTRICT AND IT MAY BE THAT FRANGIE IS WORKING TO HAVE POTENTIAL MILITARY GOVT ON TAP IN CASE HE CHOOSES TO USE IT. SOME MUSLIM SOURCES WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN INDICATE THAT, IF THE GROUND IS CAREFULLY PREPARED BEFOREHAND WITH LEBANESE FACTIONS AND SYRIANS, MILITARY CABINET UNDER STRONG MUSLIM OFFICER MIGHT NOT RPT NOT EXCITE AS MUCH OPPOSITION AMONG WAR-WEARY MUSLIMS AS ONE MIGHT EXPECT MEANTIME, ALMOST EVERYONE IS MARKING TIME TO SEE WHAT THE NEXT 24 HOURS WILL BRING.

12. THE ECONOMY CONTINUES TO DETERIORATE. AIRPORT REMAINS CLOSED, ALTHOUGH PUBLIC WORKS MINISTER OSSERAN TOLD MEA YESTERDAY BEFORE KARAME'S RESIGNATION THAT IT MAY REOPEN TODAY. MEA SAYS THAT IT WILL BEGIN OPERATIONS AGAIN AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER AIRPORT OPENS BUT THIS MAY TAKE 24/48 HOURS. TMA, WHICH HAS CREWS BASED OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY IS NOW CENTERING OPERATIONS IN AMSTERDAM AND DUBAI. SOME AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS HAVE NOW RETURNED TO WORK SO THAT PLANES CAN OVERFLY LEBANESE AIR SPACE.

12. ROCKET THIS MORNING SET FIRE TO SHELL POL TERMINAL IN DORA BUT BECAUSE SHELL FACILITIES SEPARATED FROM THOSE OF OTHER OIL MARKETERS FIRE STANDS GOOD CHANCE OF BEING CONTAINED.

13. HOSPITALS AND BAKERIES RUNNING SHORT OF FUEL OIL, ALTHOUGH GENERATING PLANT NEAR JIYE WAS RESUPPLIED DESPITE BATTLE RAGING NEARBY. STORM KNOCKED OUT ELECTRICITY FOR HALF AN HOUR OR MORE IN VARIOUS PARTS OF CITY LAST
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NIGHT, BUT CURRENT NOW RESTORED IN MOST AREAS. FIRES ALSO RAGED YESTERDAY IN QUARANTINA AND PORT AREAS, DESTROYING ANOTHER WAREHOUSE AND THREE OR FOUR SMALL BOATS.

14. TO BEST OF OUR KNOWLEDGE, ALL AMCITS REMAIN SAFE DESPITE ALMOST NON-EXISTENT SECURITY IN BEIRUT. AT APPROXIMATELY 1400 HOURS LOCAL, EMBASSY ARMORED COURIER VAN WAS HIJACKED ON CORNICHE AT RAOUCHE. GUNNERY SGT AND FOUR

MARINES IN VAN WERE ORDERED OUT BY TWO MEN ARMED
WITH KALASHNIKOVs WHO DROVE OFF IN DIRECTION OF HAMRA.
ALL OCCUPANTS UNHARMED. AT 1445 EMBASSY CARRYALL WAS
HIJACKED BY AUB GATE ON BEIRUT CORNICHE, FSLE SOLE
OCCUPANT, DRIVER UNHARMED. WE ARE TAKING PRECAUTIONS.
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